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INFORMATION

June 17, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: Viron P. Vaky

SUBJECT: CIA Piece on Soviet-Cuban Military Relations

Attached is a CIA/OCI piece speculating on the meaning of recent developments in Cuba-Soviet military relations. The piece states:

- The Soviets may intend to establish a new Soviet facility in Cuba, such as an installation for servicing naval ships or reconnaissance aircraft, or both;
- Any such move is likely to be modest and accomplished in a gradual and cautious manner to avoid flaunting military power on our doorstep or a direct confrontation while at the same time gaining additional mobility for Soviet forces.
- Such a move would be in line with its general policy of "showing the flag"; it may also be Moscow's answer to the US naval activity in the Black Sea.

MORI/CDF
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Attachment:
CIA memo dtd 6/3/70
#OCI-1367-70

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE
INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

SECRET

OCL-1367 -70

3 June 1970

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT : Some Thoughts on Recent Development in Cuban
Soviet Military Relations

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NATIONAL SECURITY
COUNCIL

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SUMMARY

Unprecedented visits to Cuba by Soviet warships and naval aircraft, statements by high-ranking officials of both countries, and an exchange of visits by Soviet Defense Minister Grechko and Cuban Armed Forces Minister Raul Castro point to a strengthening of the military relationship between Cuba and the USSR. The recent spate of activity may lead to the establishment of a new Soviet facility in Cuba, such as an installation for servicing Soviet warships or for refueling reconnaissance aircraft, or perhaps both. Whatever move is carried out, however, would almost certainly be a modest one, accomplished in a gradual manner to avoid the appearance of flaunting Soviet military power on the US doorstep. Such a low-key approach would be a cautious one designed to avoid the possibility of a recurrence of a direct confrontation while at the same time permitting the USSR additional mobility for its naval forces. Moreover, Moscow's actions would fit in with its general policy of having the Soviet fleet "show the flag" around the world. The USSR's fleet unit activity in the Caribbean may also be Moscow's answer to the regular entry of US war ships into the Black Sea. (A detailed discussion of possible developments in Soviet-Cuban military relations follows.)

1. Fidel Castro would probably be amenable to an increased Soviet military presence in Cuba for several reasons. Most important, he apparently believes that a Soviet military presence would act as a deterrent to any direct US military intervention in Cuba. An analysis of Castro's speeches and

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Cuban propaganda in general indicates that the Cuban prime minister is anxious to have a hedge against a second "Bay of Pigs" type operation and Castro is apparently of the opinion that if a Soviet military unit were on the island the US would be much more reluctant to mount an attack. The Cubans are confident--and justifiably so--that they can wrap up with ease the infiltration teams that exile groups periodically send out but they have demonstrated a peculiar sensitivity to press reports that an "exile army" is being recruited openly in various cities in the US. To the Cubans, announcements in the press of the open recruitment of the current exile army by individuals closely linked to the hated Batista regime bear striking resemblance to press reports preceding the 1961 affair and in their view is evidence of US acquiescence, at least, or of US sponsorship, at most, of another scheme to unseat the revolutionary government if the opportunity should ever arise. Castro knows that US officials are aware of the rising "discontent" in Cuba and he may believe that the US has incorrectly interpreted the disturbed Cuban internal situation as developing in such a fashion as to eventually present a propitious opportunity for a second invasion. Although his analysis of the situation may be wrong, he does interpret events from a rather narrow viewpoint with Havana as the center of the universe and he bases his decisions on that analysis, right or wrong.

2. In addition, Castro probably believes that, in the event of an attack that presents a serious challenge to his security forces, he will be better able to count on military assistance from the USSR if a Soviet military unit is in Cuba. Ever since his ignominious treatment by the USSR during the 1962 missile crisis Castro has had grave doubts about the willingness of the USSR to come to his aid in the event of attack. Both he and Raul have voiced these doubts publicly. The Soviet performance in the Middle East war in 1967 and in Vietnam reinforced his belief that unless directly involved, the USSR will probably back down in a "crunch" with the US. In this respect, the presence of a Soviet military unit would serve to alleviate his doubts.

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3. In what has come to be described as his "Czechoslovak speech" Castro posed the question of what ally would come to his aid if there arose in Cuba a situation similar to that of Czechoslovakia in 1968. He probably believes that some type of Soviet military presence (i.e., a presence beyond the estimated two to three thousand Soviet military advisers and technicians now scattered throughout Cuba) would act as a damper on any domestic elements which might contemplate active opposition and would also increase the possibility of--and facilitate--Soviet action to prop up his regime in the event that dissidents exert pressure on him to "liberalize" his policies. He may have drawn the unlikely parallel between the developments in Czechoslovakia in 1967-68 and the concurrent activities in Cuba of the "microfaction,"--a very small group of dissidents that challenged the efficacy of his austerity measures in particular, and his foreign and domestic policies in general. Although his vigorous retaliation effectively eliminated this minor irritant, he may see the day when popular dissatisfaction with onerous labor demands and continued shortages of food and consumer goods eventually creates pressures which force him to seek external support.

4. At the same time, Castro has no desire to submit totally to complete Soviet domination nor to give the appearance of being a Soviet puppet. He can be expected to make every attempt to maintain his independence while negotiating to increase the physical security of both his country and his regime. Whatever Soviet military presence is agreed upon, it will not be sufficient to upset the power structure as it now exists in Cuba.

5. What can Castro offer the USSR? In the political area, Castro has indicated that he is finally willing to take sides in the Sino-Soviet conflict. For many years he had assumed a fixed position "on the fence," stating that he belonged among those who wished for no conflict. In June 1969, however, his emissary to the Communist Party conference in Moscow acknowledged that in the event of "a provocation or aggression against the Soviet people--come from where it may--Cuba will unyieldingly be at the side of the USSR." Although it was couched in cautious terms, there is no doubt that the statement was directed against Communist China. In May 1970, during his extended visit

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to the USSR, Raul Castro made almost a verbatim repeat of this pledge. By formalizing this new policy in some way the Cubans would be giving evidence of their political support at the very time that Moscow is accelerating its efforts to achieve a measure of bloc solidarity against the Chinese.

6. In the military area, Cuba can provide the USSR with facilities to support air and naval operations in the western hemisphere at a time when the USSR is developing its seapower to operate on a worldwide basis. Perhaps most advantageous to the USSR would be a service facility for naval reconnaissance aircraft (such as the TU-95 BEARs which have already visited Cuba on three occasions this spring) and port privileges for a submarine tender (a tender and submarines have been included in each of the two groups of Soviet warships that have visited Cuba in the past year). A tender based in Cuba could service submarines including missile-carrying ones far at sea, thus avoiding the embarrassment that a shore installation, such as our naval base at Guantanamo Bay, might cause the Cubans. Cuba could provide the Soviet Navy with the means of maintaining submarines on station for a greater length of time (and possibly for extending submarine operations) perhaps even with the option of providing port facilities for the submarines themselves at a more propitious time. Similarly, a small Soviet military aircraft maintenance or support unit stationed at Jose Marti airport or at a Cuban military airfield could extend considerably the range of Soviet reconnaissance aircraft. This activity could be expanded later to include the actual stationing of Soviet reconnaissance aircraft in Cuba.

7. In any event, Castro would probably insist that the presence consist of an aircraft or naval servicing and maintenance unit rather than a ground forces unit. The Soviets would also prefer a service unit which would attract little attention and could be expanded later if necessary. The presence of such a unit might eventually be employed to embarrass the US in the eyes of Latin America; to raise the international political temperature and exert pressure on the US; to provide the US with a domestic "hot potato;" or

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to establish trade bait for quid-pro-quo negotiating with the US.

8. To guard against a Soviet withdrawal such as occurred in 1962, Castro might hope to formalize Cuba's closer military relationship with the USSR on paper. To serve this purpose, he may try to involve the USSR in some type of mutual defense agreement by offering to formalize in writing Cuba's solidarity with the USSR in the Sino-Soviet dispute. He would probably also attempt to include a pledge of Cuban support in future "Czechoslovak-type" crises in return for a reciprocal statement guaranteeing Soviet backing in the event of a "counterrevolution" in Cuba. There seems to be no chance, however, that the USSR would respond affirmatively to Cuban overtures for such an agreement. Soviet officials are well aware of Castro's unpredictable nature and would be extremely cautious about entering into even a tenuous agreement which could be used by Castro as a form of diplomatic blackmail. In the event of either a "Czechoslovak-type" situation or a Sino-Soviet clash, Cuban support would of course be symbolic rather than substantive whereas a Cuba-US crisis could bring immediate and insistent demands for Soviet military and diplomatic involvement from Havana. Simply stated, the Cubans have too little to offer the USSR in return for the risks inherent in even the most vaguely worded mutual defense agreement.

9. At the time of the 1962 missile crisis, several Soviet diesel submarines were headed for Cuba. They returned to Soviet waters before reaching the island, however, so we do not know whether the Soviets intended to establish a submarine base in Cuba at that time. The only submarine base actually established by the Soviets on foreign soil was in Albania in the late 1950's, prior to Tirane's split with Moscow.

10. Moscow may be interested in the kind of facilities it now enjoys in the UAR. Soviet diesel submarines are now using port facilities in Alexandria to replenish and make minor repairs. A submarine tender assigned to the Soviet Mediterranean squadron frequently calls there and, by making

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use of these facilities, Soviet diesel submarines have been able to extend their Mediterranean deployments to as long as six months. Presumably, similar facilities in Cuba would be just as advantageous to the Soviet navy in the Atlantic.

11. The operation of a force of surface combatants in the Caribbean at much more frequent intervals than the present once-a-year pattern seems unlikely in light of Soviet naval commitments in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. A small squadron of attack submarines operating from a base in Cuba or from a tender based in Cuba, however, would give the Soviets excellent access for intelligence collection and training operations against Polaris submarines working out of Charleston, South Carolina, as well as against naval forces stationed at the major bases of Mayport and Key West, Florida.

12. For political and security reasons, it seems unlikely that Soviet missile submarines--such as the Y-class ballistic missile units now making regular patrols in the Atlantic--would operate from Cuban bases. Other nuclear powered submarines such as the N-class attack units and E-II class cruise missile units probably would not use Cuban facilities on a regular basis. Submarine tenders and other logistics ships operating from Cuban facilities, however, could provide support at sea to Soviet nuclear and missile submarines in the relatively secure waters of the Cape Verde Basin without creating undue political problems for either the Soviets or the Cubans.

13. A facility for servicing naval reconnaissance aircraft would also be of use to the USSR. If aircraft such as the TU-95 BEAR D were to operate out of Cuba, they could provide operational intelligence on US naval forces in the Gulf of Mexico and along the east coast as far north as Boston. (Ten Soviet naval reconnaissance aircraft are currently based in the UAR to collect intelligence on the US Sixth Fleet.) In addition, the BEAR D is equipped to provide radar target data to cruise missile-equipped submarines and surface ships such as the E-II class nuclear

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powered submarine and the Kresta-class cruiser which arrived in Cienfuegos, Cuba on 14 May.

14. Certain tentative feelers along the lines described above may have been discussed during Soviet Defense Minister Grechko's visit to Cuba last November. The significance of his trip, however, is still unknown and he and his star-studded delegation may have been concerned essentially with assessing Cuba's military establishment, its use of Soviet weapons and equipment, and its future needs for resupply and modernization. Grechko has conducted many similar visits to other countries outside the socialist camp in the past few years and no outstanding politico-military significance seems to have been attached to these trips. (See attached annex).

15. Little more can be said of Raul Castro's visit to Moscow in April and May.

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Raul may have had some success, however, in arranging for a new series of military deliveries to refurbish and update the Cuban armed forces. Only a few shipments have been received since the last series ended in February 1968 and a major resupply effort may get under way shortly. Unlike Grechko's trip to Cuba, Raul's visit to Moscow was not unprecedented. He has traveled to the USSR often in the past and spent almost two months there in late 1965.

16. Whatever the nature of any arrangements the Cubans and Soviets may be working out, Fidel seems to be preparing public opinion and creating the proper setting for possibly justifying closer military ties by resurrecting the old but reliable ogre of the "imperialist threat." His reaction to the armed infiltration by exiles in mid-April, for example, exceeded Havana's reaction to similar attempts in December 1968 and in May, September, and December 1969. The exiles on 11 May 1970 gave him a made-to-order issue by sinking two small Cuban fishing boats and kidnaping eleven crew members. On this occasion, too, Castro's reaction exceeded

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that which occurred in late 1963 when units of the Venezuelan Navy seized a large Cuban fishing trawler with more than 30 crewmen aboard.

18. By attributing both incidents directly to the US government, Castro chose to ignore facts readily available to him.

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In addition, he has access to the interrogation reports on captured infiltrators and experience indicates that the Cubans are able to reconstruct the facts with considerable accuracy by means of prisoner interrogations. Although Castro may be sincerely worried about US participation in a long-range plan to organize on a large scale an exile army for another Bay of Pigs-style invasion, he leaves open to question the sincerity of his claims that irresponsible exile antics are to be blamed on the US.

19. Castro's present aggressive stance can be attributed partly to his desire to create a diversion from his failure to achieve the highly touted goal of ten million tons in the current sugar harvest. The harvest, however, which broke all previous production records, can hardly be the reason for such actions as Castro's rough treatment of Swiss diplomatic officials during the incident of the kidnaped fishermen; his verbal abuse of the British governor of the Bahamas Islands; his cryptic hint that "we'll always be ready to increase our military ties with the Soviet Union" which he made in his speech of 22 April; his virtual siege of the old US embassy building in Havana in May; his remarks on 19 May about not having "long range aircraft" and about "going over from the defensive to the offensive" against those countries from which the exiles launch their attacks; and his threat in the same speech about eliminating all US representation in Havana's diplomatic community. His provocative attitude may also be due partly to his frustration over failure to gain what he considers to be significant military backing from the USSR.

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